



# Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*RI Department of Education  
in Partnership with the  
RI Department of Health*

*March 2006*

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is an anonymous and voluntary survey conducted among random samples of high school students in over 60 states and municipalities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the YRBS to monitor risk behaviors related to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. In the spring of 1997, 2001, 2003, and 2005, Rhode Island administered the YRBS to 1,528, 1,392, 1,814, and 2,362 adolescents, representing survey response rates of 60%, 63%, 66%, and 71%, respectively. These weighted findings are representative of 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade public high school students statewide and can be used to make important inferences concerning health-risk behaviors.

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## **SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

**There were statistically significant trends for 18 of 36 key health risk behaviors reported in this summary (Figures 1 and 2). Thirteen measures improved (i.e., lower risk), including seatbelt use, inhalant use, physical fighting, drinking and driving, weapon carrying, smoking cigarettes, smoking at school, drinking alcohol, marijuana use ever, ecstasy use, illegal drugs at school, condom use, and activity level in physical education (PE) classes. Only 5 measures had worsening trends (i.e., higher risk), including AIDS/HIV education, actual overweight, perceived overweight, milk consumption, and moderate physical activity. The remaining 18 risk behaviors remained relatively stable over time.**

### ***Injury and Violence***

The proportion of students rarely or never wearing seatbelts decreased substantially from 33% in 1997 to 13% in 2005, the greatest change occurring in 2001. Riding in the past month with a driver who had been drinking declined steadily from 36% to 28% across the first 3 surveys, and appeared to level off at 29% in 2005. 83% of bicycle riders still did not wear a helmet in 2005 (Figure 3). Fighting decreased significantly from 35% to 28%, and weapon carrying dropped from 18% to 12% between 1997 and 2005. Nearly 10% of students from 1997 to 2005 consistently reported being physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend. One fourth of students felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past year in all survey years, while attempted suicides remained stable at just below 10%.

### ***Current Tobacco, Alcohol, and Marijuana Use (Within the Past Month Preceding the Survey)***

Current cigarette use decreased steeply and steadily from 35% to 16% between 1997 and 2005. Cigarette smoking at school also dropped substantially from 20% in 1997 to 8% in 2005. In 2005, current use of any tobacco product was 20%, ranging from 15% for 9<sup>th</sup> graders to 25% for 12<sup>th</sup> graders (Figure 3). The rate of current alcohol drinking also declined significantly from over 50% of students in 1997 and 2001 to 43% in 2005. Current marijuana use was 25% in 2005, with an apparent declining trend since 2001.

### ***Other Drug Use (Lifetime Use Indicates at Least One Time Ever)***

Lifetime inhalant use declined significantly to 10% in 2003 and 2005, half the 1997 rate, while lifetime cocaine varied between 6% and 10% between 1997 and 2005. The proportion of students ever using ecstasy declined considerably (9% to 6%) from 2003 to 2005, while lifetime marijuana use also showed a significant decrease (47% to 43%) from 1997 to 2005.

### ***Sexual Behaviors***

Nearly half of students in 2005 had ever had sex, which may indicate a slight increase over time. The proportion having recent sex (last 3 months) fluctuated near one-third from 1997 to 2005. Among sexually active students, use of condoms increased steadily from 52% to 66% in the same period. 19% of those sexually active used birth control pills (Figure 3) in 2005, with the highest rate among 12<sup>th</sup> graders (27%). In 2005, only 87% reported ever having AIDS/HIV education, a significant declining trend from 95% in 1997.

### ***Weight Management and Dietary Behaviors***

There were small, but significant, increasing trends in the rates of overweight students (9% in 2001 vs. 13% in 2005) and students describing themselves as overweight (29% in 1997 vs. 33% in 2005). The proportions of students at risk of becoming overweight (14%-15%) and trying to lose weight (42%-45%) were stable over time. There appears to be a discrepancy among the above rates, especially between actual overweight and trying to lose weight. However, the overweight estimates may be low, as they are based on self-reported height and weight. In each survey year, just over 25% of students ate at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, while the proportion drinking 3 or more glasses of milk daily declined significantly from 23% to 18% between 1997 and 2005.

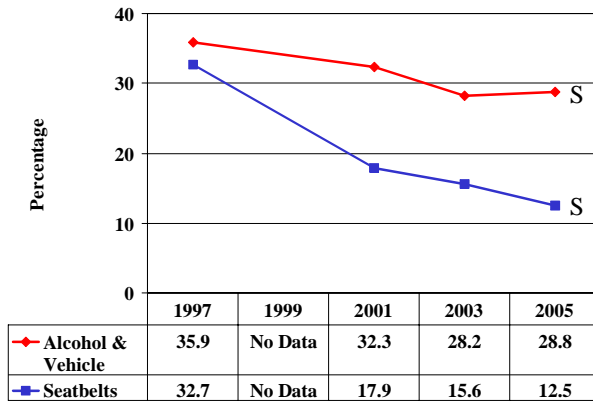
### ***Physical Activity and Asthma***

There was a significant increase in the proportion of students with **insufficient** moderate exercise, leveling off at 76% in 2005. **Insufficient** vigorous exercise (36% in 2005) and lack of any exercise (10% in 2005) remained stable across years. The proportion reporting at least 20 minutes of exercise or sports in PE class increased significantly from 67% in 1997 to 87% in 2005. However, in 2005, over one third of students watched 3 or more hours of television on a school day (Figure 3). Asthma may affect levels of physical activity. Asthma was a new measure in 2005, with 17% of students reporting that they currently had the condition (Figure 3).

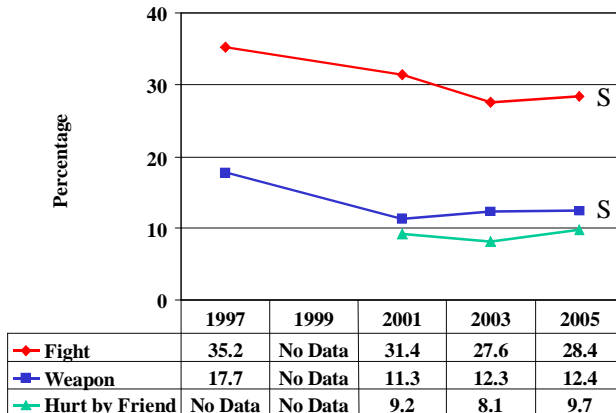
**Figure 1 – Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, Grades 9-12, YRBS (1997, 2001, 2003, 2005)**

***Injury and Violence:***

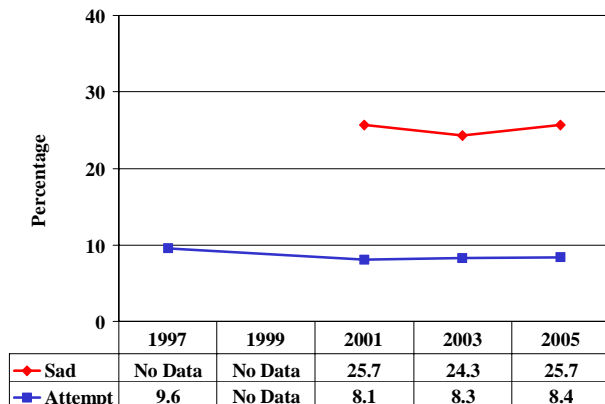
Percentage of Students Who Rode in a Vehicle Driven by Someone Who Had Been Drinking Alcohol in the Past Month; Rarely or Never Wear a Seat Belt When Riding in a Car



Percentage of Students Who Were in a Physical Fight in the Past Year; Carried a Weapon in the Past Month; Were Hit, Slapped, or Physically Hurt by a Boyfriend or Girlfriend in the Past Year

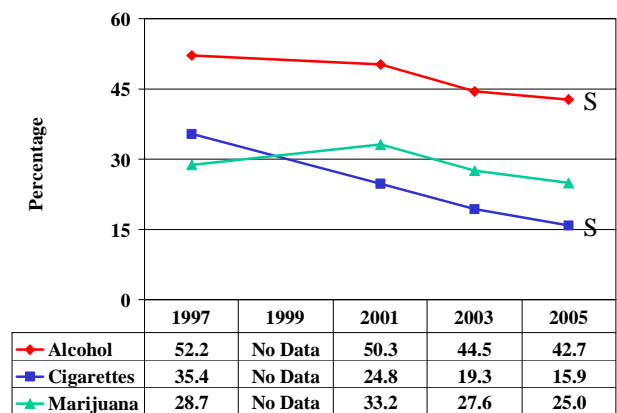


Percentage of Students Who Felt So Sad or Hopeless Almost Every Day for Two Weeks or More in a Row That They Stopped Doing Some Usual Activities in the Past Year; Attempted Suicide in the Past Year



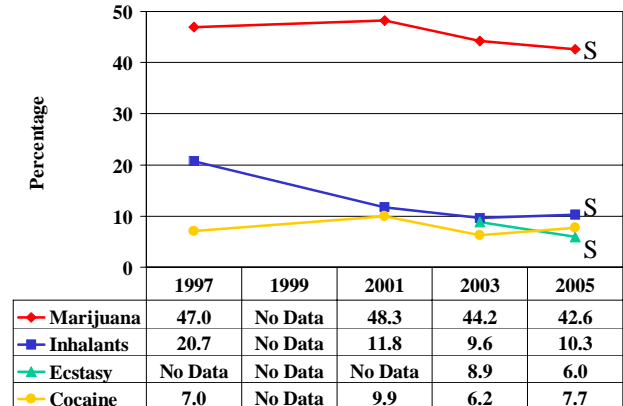
***Current Tobacco, Alcohol, and Marijuana Use:***

Percentage of Students Who Drank Alcohol; Smoked Cigarettes; Used Marijuana - in the Past Month



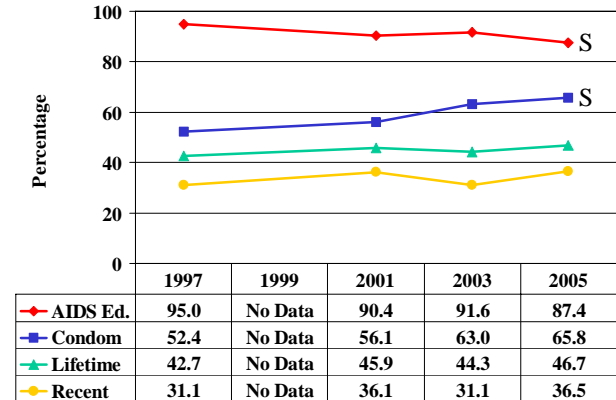
***Other Drug Use:***

Percentage of Students Who Have Ever Used Marijuana; Ever Used Inhalants to Get High; Ever Used Ecstasy; Ever Used Cocaine



***Sexual Behaviors:***

Percentage of Students Who Had Ever Been Taught About AIDS or HIV Infection in School; Had Sex in Past 3 Months and Used Condom the Last Time; Ever Had Sex; Had Sex in the Past 3 Months;



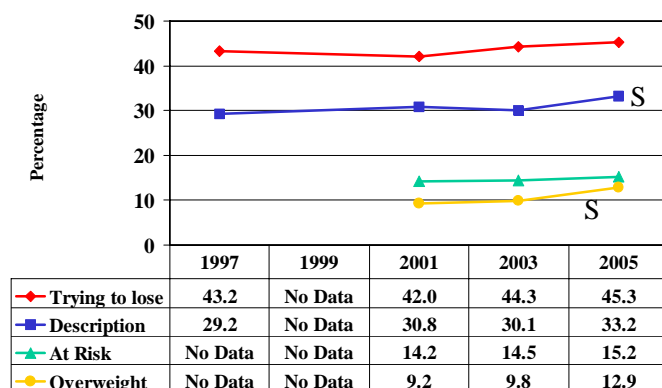
Note: An "S" in the line graph denotes a statistically significant linear change.

Source: 1997 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1528) 2003 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1814)  
2001 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1392) 2005 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2362)

**Figure 1 (Continued) – Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, Grades 9-12, YRBS (1997, 2001, 2003, 2005)**

**Weight Management and Dietary Behaviors:**

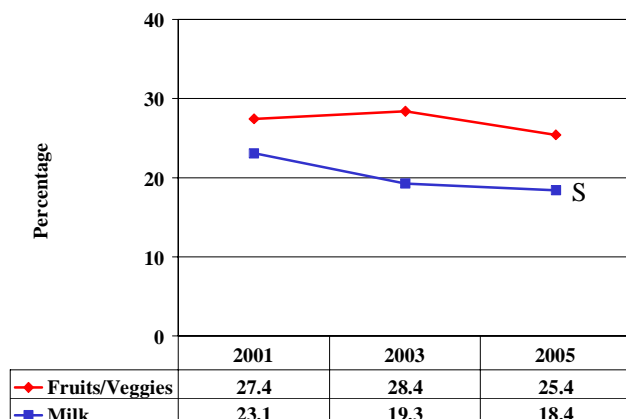
Percentage of Students Who Were Trying to Lose Weight; Described Themselves As Overweight; Are at Risk for Becoming Overweight\*; Are Overweight\*\*



\* At or above the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile but below the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for body mass index by age and sex based on reference data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I.

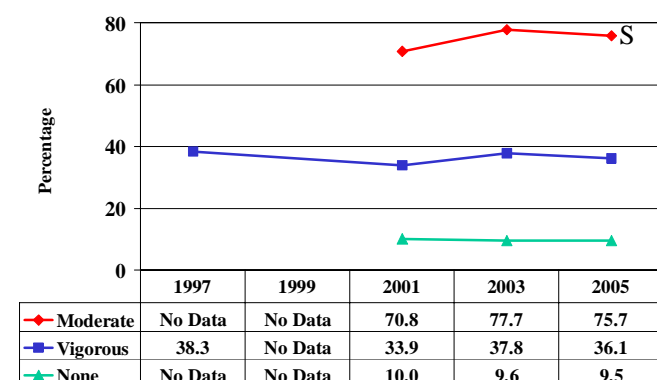
\*\* At or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for body mass index by age and sex based on reference data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I.

Percentage of Students Who Ate Five or More Servings of Fruit and Vegetables Per Day; Drank Three or More Glasses of Milk Per Day – in the Past Week



**Physical Activity:**

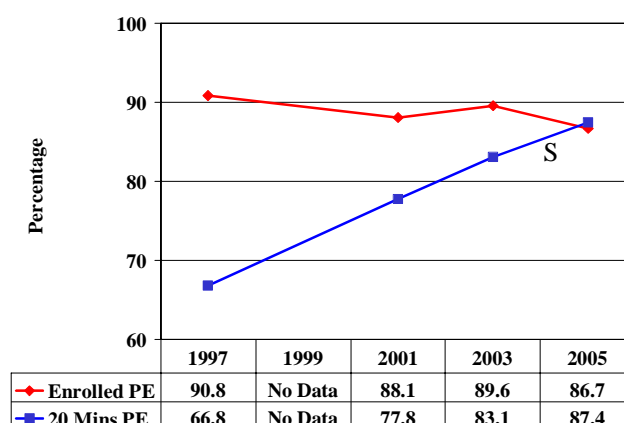
Percentage of Students Who Had Insufficient Moderate Physical Activity\*; Insufficient Vigorous Physical Activity\*\*; Did Not Participate in Any Vigorous or Moderate Physical Activity - in the Past Week



\* Moderate physical activity is defined as participation in physical activities that do not make you sweat or breathe hard. The recommendation calls for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 or more days per week.

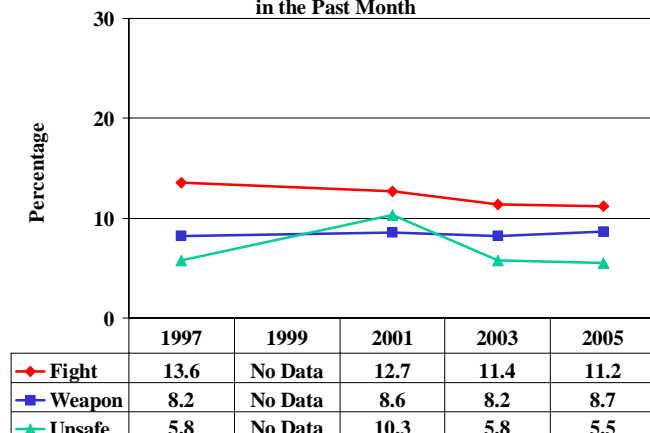
\*\* Vigorous physical activity is defined as exercise or participation in physical activities that make you sweat or breathe hard. The recommendation calls for at least 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity on 3 or more days per week.

Percentage of Students Who Attended PE Class 1+ Days in an Average School Week; Exercised or Played Sports Over 20 Minutes in an Average PE Class (Among Students Enrolled in PE)

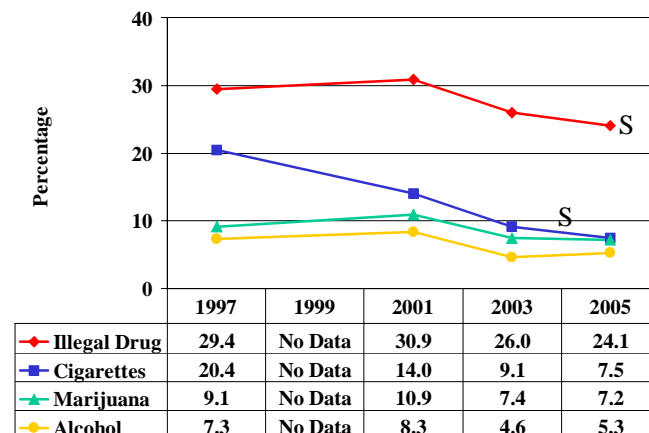


**Figure 2 – Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students Occurring on School Property, Grades 9-12, YRBS (1997, 2001, 2003, 2005)**

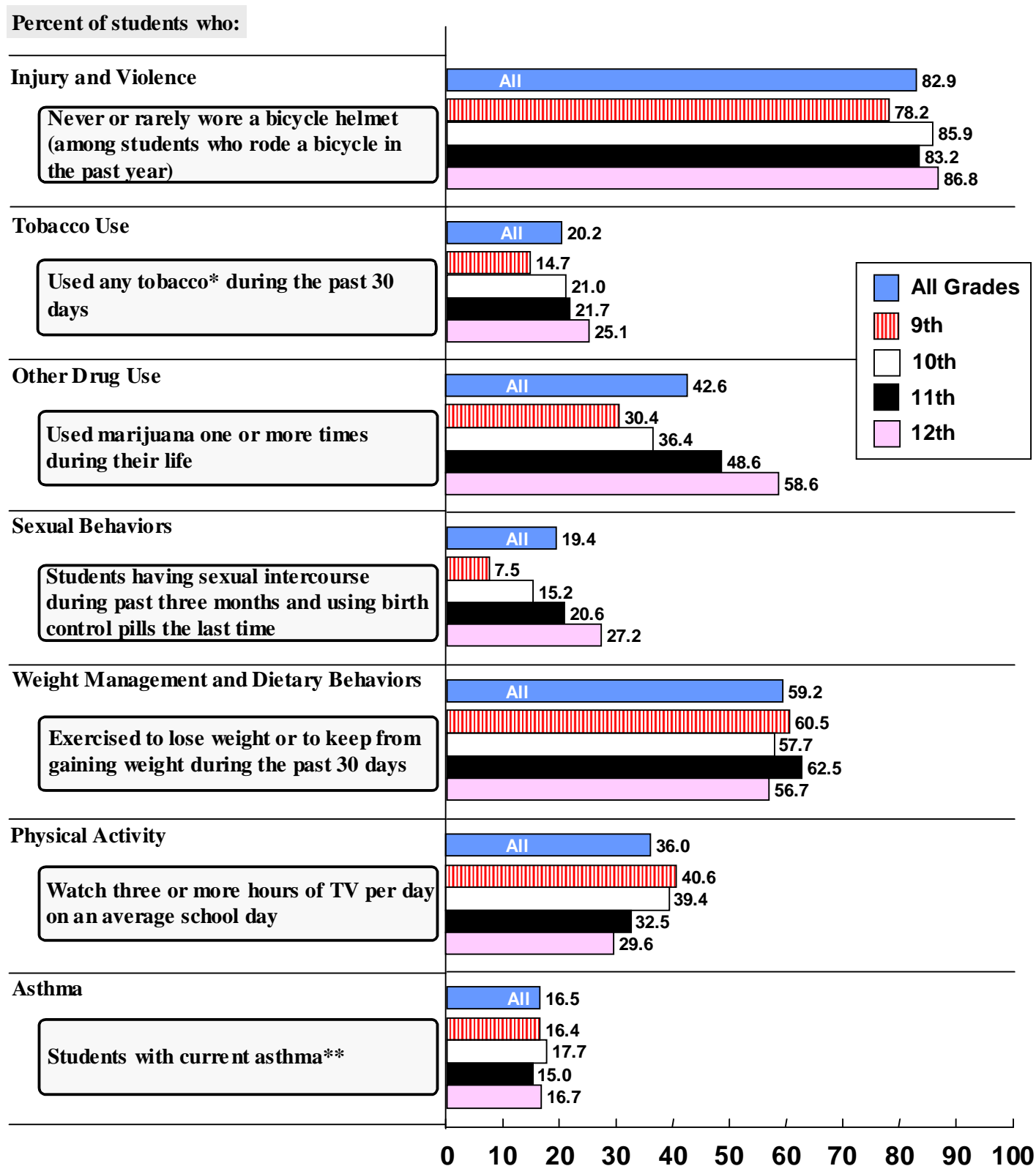
Percentage of Students Who Were in a Physical Fight on School Property in the Past Year; Were Threatened or Injured With a Weapon on School Property in the Past Year; Did Not Go to School Because They Felt Unsafe in the Past Month



Percentage of Students Who Were Offered, Sold, or Given an Illegal Drug on School Property in the Past Year; Smoked Cigarettes, Used Marijuana, Drank Alcohol on School Property in the Past Month



**Figure 3 – Selected Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, By Grades, 2005 YRBS**



\* Includes cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff or dip.

\*\* Includes students who have ever been told by a doctor or nurse that they had asthma and who either report that they have asthma without having had an asthma episode or attack in the past year or who report that they have had an asthma episode or attack in the past year.

Source: 2005 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2362)